

PREFACE

Since September 2001, Northern Virginians have experienced not only the 9/11 attacks, but also the anthrax attacks, the sniper attacks, the continued terror alerts, and the war on terrorism. Two years later, thousands of otherwise healthy people in Northern Virginia are still afraid, anxious, or sad and are experiencing fatigue, having difficulty concentrating, or having problems sleeping. These persistent reactions show how long lasting the impact of terrorism can be. They also show the ongoing need for mental health professionals and paraprofessionals to help people recognize and cope with these reactions.

As a Disaster Mental Health Coordinator for the last 16 years, I have directed the Virginia Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services' response to a wide variety of disasters, including the 9/11 terrorist attacks. I also have had the honor of serving as the Director of the Community Resilience Project of Northern Virginia. This project was established through a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant to help people in Northern Virginia recognize and cope with their reactions to 9/11 and the terrorist events since then.

Different from natural disasters, terrorist attacks are manmade, with the intent to cause harm, instill fear, and undermine our sense of security. How disaster mental health workers prepare before an attack and the steps we take immediately after are critical in helping individuals and communities cope with the terrible impact these events have. This training provides information and suggestions based on our unique experiences to help mental health professionals and paraprofessionals prepare now, and to help them know what to do in the early phases of the response.

This training includes a manual, a field guide, and a CD-ROM. The CD-ROM includes checklists, Web links, expert interviews, and role-plays. The training represents what we know and have experienced until now. Mental health response to terrorism is evolving. Therefore, mental health workers are encouraged to continue to learn about and keep up to date on the latest interventions and strategies to help individuals and communities prepare for and cope with terrorism.

The psychological casualties of terrorism far outnumber physical casualties. Preparing now—with plans, training, and coordination—to deal with the psychological impact of another terrorist attack is essential. This training can be a valuable tool for mental health workers as they encounter the challenges and rewards of nurturing and celebrating the resilience of those who have survived the unthinkable.

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